

Testimony Before the  
Connecticut General Assembly  
Education Committee

March 1, 2023

Stephen Tracy  
Interim Chair  
Danbury Charter School Planning Team

Chairpersons McCrory and Currey, Members of the Committee:

My name is Stephen Tracy. I am a retired public school teacher and former Connecticut school superintendent. It was my privilege to chair the 1992 Connecticut Taskforce on Charter Schools that helped to pave the way for our state's first charter school law. So, I have been an advocate for parent choice and innovation in public education for a long time.

I am here today as the Interim Chair of the Danbury Charter School Planning Team to urge your approval of Raised Bill # 1096: An Act Concerning the Charter School Approval Process. Bill #1096 would return us to the more sensible charter school approval process that prevailed in Connecticut up until 2015.

Anyone who is truly committed to the promise of charter schools – to the notion that educators, parents and other community members should be empowered to propose new independent public schools under charters from the state government – should want an approval process that is rigorous and thorough. But what we do not need is a process that is so convoluted as to actually discourage citizens from stepping forward to create new, innovative schools.

Like other charter school aspirants, our Danbury group was required to provide a detailed description of the educational program that we intended to offer along with a budget demonstrating financial viability. In addition, we had to show support for our school from a diverse group of families and community leaders. Then, following a public hearing, we had to secure the approval of the State Department of Education and, ultimately, the State Board of Education.

After all of that, we should have had the green light to commence the daunting task of actually bringing our school to life – hiring staff, enrollment students, preparing a facility, and so on. But since 2015, state law has provided that each approved charter school must come before the General Assembly to secure its operating funds. In some cases, this additional requirement has afforded an opportunity for people who are actually opposed to the very notion of independent public charter schools and parent choice to derail the process by blocking the funding. In Danbury's case, this has gone on for over five years now.

I urge you to support Bill #1096 so that charter schools that have gone through a rigorous process of administrative review and have been approved by the State Board of Education since 2015 are included automatically in the state education budget so that they can proceed to fulfill their promise of improved education for Connecticut's children.

Thank you.

Stephen Tracy  
Goshen, Connecticut  
Stephentracy7@gmail.com